

Wildlife Rehabilitation Organizations Meeting
November 17, 2003

Topic: Distribution of Leon County Wildlife Preservation Funds

Attendees: Nani Beck – Goose Creek Wildlife; Jane Fleitman – Operation Wildlife Survival;
John Johnson – St. Francis Wildlife

Facilitators: Will Sheftal – Tree Bank/Wildlife Committee Member (Leon County Agricultural
Extension Office); Scott Ross - Committee Facilitator (Growth and Environmental Management)

- I. Overview – A brief overview concerning the intent of the meeting and a brief history of previous Wildlife Fund distributions was given by Scott Ross. During the September 2003 reimbursement distribution approved by the Board, staff was directed to meet with the groups to see if a consensus could be reached on the methodology for distributing the funds. The primary goal is to have the different groups agree on a fund distribution methodology when reimbursement requests are made, especially since the fund does not normally have enough revenue to cover all of the requested reimbursement costs.

Presently, the distribution formula approved by the Board allocates funds based on the number of animals received over a year from all groups, divided by the amount of money available for distribution. This gives a cost per animal that is multiplied by the number of animals received by each group to determine the amount eligible for reimbursement.

There was also some discussion on the different sizes of the organizations and the number of animals treated.

II. Group Discussion on Wildlife Fund Distribution Methodology

Will Sheftal directed the session to gain input on what the different organizations felt were the most important items to consider for reimbursement requests for rehabilitating wildlife.

The following list shows the items that the different groups considered important for reimbursement.

Organization Input: Priority Factors

- Number of Animal
 - 1) Native (FFWCC List)
 - 2) Taken in except DOA
- Medical Expenses depends on type of injury surgical and medical supplies
- Habitat restoration
- Caging
- New Facility support –start-up
- Education - "Orphaned" issued especially
- Rescue equipment

There was a brief discussion on the other sources of revenue provided to the groups to conduct their rehabilitation efforts.

The groups receive money through fund raising, donations, and the smaller groups like Operation Wildlife Survival pay for many costs out-of-pocket.

St. Francis does receive funding from the City of Tallahassee and Leon County, but the funding is for 24-hour, on-call emergency service. The City's funding was based on a government cost/minimum number of animal threshold to determine the contact amount, and the County's funding varies year to year. There is some reporting to each government entity regarding how many animals are picked up in a year. Jon Johnson reiterated that this service was separate from the rehabilitation efforts his organization does.

Priority Factor Consensus

The groups then reviewed the original list and achieved consensus on which variables should be considered for reimbursement.

The list included:

- Number of native animals received (Native is defined as listed by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission) except for animals that are dead on arrival.
- Food
- Medical Expenses – surgical and medical supplies
- There was also consensus that any distribution formula should be weighted somewhat to allow the smaller groups to receive a higher percentage of reimbursement. This is since the larger groups are more established and able to raise more private funds, and allows the smaller groups to establish themselves. This also allows the County to have a broader net of organizations to handle injured wildlife.

There was discussion about the wide variance in average cost to feed and medicate animals taken in by the four rehabilitators. Will Sheftall cautioned against the tendency to use these data to compare rehabilitators for cost efficiency, since they do not present the total cost per animal treated as a pro rata unit of the entire operating budget.

There was agreement on this point, and furthermore, there was consensus among the rehabilitators that even the food and medical costs should vary widely, since some organizations specialize in larger animals (more food), animals needing longer rehab time (more food), animals requiring live mice or special diet items (more expensive food), animals fallen victim in large numbers to epidemics (more medical costs), "high value" animals with more severe injuries but worth the gamble on recovery (more medical costs + more food for longer rehab).

In fact, these specialties are well known, and animals are often passed from one organization to another to capitalize on the variation in caging and intensive labor available among the rehabilitator community. This sharing and specialization illustrate why they all support being reimbursed on a schedule that reflects justifiably variable actual expenses - rather than on a schedule that gives all animals taken in an equal reimbursement, as was the case in 2003.

All the groups in attendance supported the concept of weighting the formula for distributing funds toward the smaller organizations, to make sure they can survive, grow and continue to play valuable niche roles in the cooperative community of rehabilitators. This reality was accentuated by Jon Johnson's statement that St Francis, the largest of the 4 rehabilitators, was near maximum size for efficient operation, and that as the county grows and more wildlife are displaced and injured, the other 3 organizations - plus others yet to be established - would need to grow to meet the increase in need, and should be given reimbursement disproportionate to their current size and animal in-take numbers in order to ensure their evolution to larger, more mature organizations with better fund-raising capability

Also, weighting the formula somewhat to the smaller groups will allow them to utilize the weighting to purchase start up equipment and caging. Caging is the most variable cost among the groups in the current reimbursement criteria, and there was consensus that it should not be included in routine reimbursement requests.

The Wildlife Committee will use the amount of eligible expenses (food and medical) divided by the animals rescued by each organization to determine each groups average cost to feed and medicate the types of animals it treats, according to its specialization.

The rehabilitation groups all felt it was important to use the number of animals received and not the rehabilitation success rate that the committee recommended during the last fund distribution.

Will Sheftal and Scott Ross will use last year's available amount of revenue for distribution, and determine different weight factors that could be considered for distributing the funds. These different examples will then be distributed to the rehabilitation groups for comment.